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SUBJECT: LAVALAS: ARISTIDE "READY TO RETURN," BUT WANTS
SECURITY GUARANTEES

* Missing Section 001 *

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Aristide Foundation and Lavalas are organizing marches to demonstrate the extent of their support; the next is planned for December 16 to commemorate the anniversary of Aristide's first election victory in 1990.

16. (C) Some political actors tend to confirm the party's claim that grassroots support for Lavalas is strengthening in the wake of cost-of-living increases and hurricane-related damage. Lespwa member and Chamber of Deputies President Eric Jean Jacques told Poloff in late November that Lavalas support looked particularly strong as the elections approach; he assessed that Narcisse's wing of the party is stronger than former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune's. Separately, Fusion of Haitian Social Democrats Spokesman Micha Gaillard told Poloffs December 2 that middle-class parties that draw their support from educated professionals would confront serious challenges in the April elections, and cited the strength of Lavalas and its popular organizations as proof. He predicted that the two factions of Lavalas would reconcile before the party chose senatorial candidates.

THE PARTY LINE ON PREVAL, CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

17. (C) Narcisse criticized President Rene Preval and Prime Minister Michele Pierre-Louis for lack of progress on food security, health, and education. She said the party agrees that certain constitutional reforms are necessary, including the elimination of prohibitions on referenda and dual nationality, but she believes that amendments must be adopted using the method described in the constitution. That pointed to the need for quick elections, since the Senate's 12 vacant seats must be filled before the amendment process can begin. (Note: a constitutional amendment requires a two-thirds vote of both legislative chambers in successive legislatures. End note.) She said the party's platform reflects traditional Lavalas emphasis on the poor, including literacy, health, and other popular programs. The party is strongly committed to 'popular democracy.' Narcisse and her colleagues repeatedly referred to Aristide's departure as a "coup d'etat" and a "kidnapping" in which the United States was complicit.

18. (C) Despite strong indications to the contrary, Narcisse insisted that Lavalas remains united as a party. She dismissed the meetings held by rival FL groups to mark important Lavalas anniversaries in October and November (ref A) as insignificant, and pointed to the French Socialists as proof that even modern parties have different "currents" that reconcile as elections approach. Asked whether she had patched over her public dispute with Lavalas Senator Rudy Herivaux, she evaded the question and repeated her earlier public criticism of Herivaux as having falsely claimed to represent FL during his negotiations with President Rene Preval this summer over the composition of the new government. (Note: She passed up the opportunity to say anything positive about Herivaux, despite his appearance at the Aristide Foundation-backed event November 3 to discuss and organize for the upcoming elections) see ref B. End note.) She said the party's slogan for the elections will be "Against the betrayal, for the return" -- an indication that the Executive Committee plans to place Aristide front and center in the upcoming campaign, in contrast to Neptune's faction of the party. (Note: According to a MINUSTAH report, Narcisse and other Executive Committee members told SRSG Annabi on November 6 that the slogan is a deliberately provocative formulation, given that many consider Yvon Neptune and current President Rene Preval to have betrayed Aristide. End note.)

ARISTIDE FOUNDATION STILL ACTIVE, SOMEWHAT

19. (C) While Embassy observers have noticed a conspicuous lack of activity at the Aristide Foundation for Democracy, Foundation Director Toussaint Hilaire painted a picture of its continued vitality and outreach on education and health issues. The Foundation organized a forum on World AIDS Day December 1, he said, and the previous week Haitian doctors trained in Cuba provided health services to over 1,500 poor Haitians in the framework of a Foundation-organized event.

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Literature provided by the Aristide Foundation also highlights its work in literacy and citizen journalism programs. While the Foundation is not technically a part of Fanmi Lavalas, he said, the Foundation is at the disposal of the party, which frequently makes use of it. (Note: A 2004 document from the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada states that the Aristide Foundation was established in 1995 at the conclusion of the President's first term in office, but that its activities were dramatically curtailed when Aristide departed the country. The GOH's Central Financial Intelligence Unit (UCREF) in the Ministry of Justice and Public Security published two reports in 2005 alleging serious irregularities in the Foundation's books that it concluded were signs of significant corruption, according to contemporary press reports. End note.)

110. (C) Narcisse and Hilaire also briefed Poloff on the situation at the Aristide Foundation's university, also located in Tabarre. Hilaire said that construction of the university started in 2000 and the university opened in 2001. Beginning in 2004, he added, U.S. and then MINUSTAH forces occupied it. The Foundation reestablished physical and legal control over premises earlier this year, Hilaire said, after winning a legal battle with the Haitian State University. (Note: The Haitian State University (UEH) rector still disputes the Foundation's claim to the university, according to an October 16 press report, on the grounds that the university was built with public funds. End note.) Hilaire told Poloff that a significant amount of equipment and material, including many computers, was missing from the buildings when the Foundation regained control of them.

COMMENT: LAVALAS MAY BE STRENGTHENING

¶11. (C) Narcisse is exploiting her claimed proximity to Aristide as a leadership asset in FL, which she will use to her advantage as her wing of the party stages mass events on significant dates in the life and career of the former President. Executive Committee organizers of these gatherings will seek to demonstrate their organizational capacity, rally election support, and upstage the Neptune FL faction. The march planned for December 16 may be the first in such a series. A similar march to commemorate Aristide's birthday earlier this year drew 2,000 to 3,000 people (ref C). Certain political actors fear that poor economic conditions combined with perceptions that the government has not moved fast enough to provide disaster relief may rebound to the political benefit of Lavalas in the April Senate elections.

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